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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: SOME VIEWS ON THE NEW CABINET

REF: A. AMMAN 9476
[1](#)B. AMMAN 8823

Classified By: CDA DANIEL RUBINSTEIN FOR REASONS 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Jordan's new government, sworn in November 27 under Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit, won a vote of confidence in the Chamber of Deputies by a wide margin December 20 (septel). But despite the government's strong start with parliament, some in Amman's reformist and activist communities have quite modest expectations for the Kingdom's third PM in eight months. If Bakhit plans to move ahead on reforms as he claims, one of his early tasks will be to reverse the cynicism that is widespread among reform advocates in parts of Jordan's political and media classes. If convinced, they could prove to be useful allies. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Some of our pro-reform contacts express hope that Bakhit, with his broad military, diplomatic, and government experience, will be able to advance reform, notably on the political front. However, many do not expect him to succeed. Former MP Hamadeh Fara'neh, a Palestinian-Jordanian who is a prominent political columnist, told poloff that he hosted Bakhit and chiefs of Jordan's leading socialist and nationalist parties in early December in his home for dinner. (Note: None of these parties have representation in parliament.) Bakhit impressed Fara'neh with his promises at the gathering to push for legislation to democratize the electoral system, strengthen political parties, and weaken the professional associations. However, Fara'neh went on to observe that in his view, every Jordanian government since 1989 has "broken promises" on electoral reform, implying another disappointment would not surprise him. Bakhit's government "needs to do the opposite to stay credible."

[1](#)3. (C) Human rights activists shared similar views with Post. Jamal Rifa'i, head of the Jordanian Society for Human Rights, told poloff that Bakhit is an "honest, simple, and fair" man, but called his team unimpressive. Noting that most of the cabinet are former ministers, he said "we were expecting a new generation and new blood, but unfortunately this did not happen." Nadia Bushnaq, Director of the Family Guidance and Awareness Center and a member of the National Agenda commission (ref B), lamented the presence in Bakhit's cabinet of only one woman, down from four in the last government. She also complained that Bakhit "decided to bring in all the old faces, and this does not bode well for reform. It's the same old stuff." COMMENT: Given how ministers are selected, this criticism of Bakhit is unfair and inaccurate. END COMMENT. Referring to her service on the National Agenda commission, she said, "we've been working day and night for eight months on reform; people are thirsty and dying for reform. But with the same old faces, how can this be achieved?"

[1](#)4. (C) Oraib Rantawi, the Palestinian-Jordanian head of Al Quds Political Research Center and daily columnist for the

Arabic daily Al Dustour who has often been critical of recent cabinets, told poloff that Bakhit is the strongest PM of King Abdullah's reign, and that his program is "well balanced between security and political development." Sounding more upbeat than others, Rantawi said that people are confident in the new government and have high expectations for it to succeed. Because of that confidence, a failure of the government to achieve its goals would be "particularly devastating."

¶15. (C) Fathallah Omrani, president of Jordan's textile workers union, was very blunt. "The new cabinet is corrupt. Where are Muasher and Awadallah?" he asked poloff rhetorically, referring to former cabinet members and trusted advisors to the King, Marwan Muasher and Bassam Awadallah. When poloff reminded Omrani that parliament forced the ouster of Awadallah on then PM-Badran, Omrani replied with another question: "Who made parliament?" His implication was that the current electoral system lacks legitimacy.

¶16. (C) For their part, MPs continue to be generally satisfied with the cabinet (ref A). MP Imad Maa'ya expressed a typical view to poloff, stressing that Jordan needed a PM like Bakhit who could focus on security issues.

¶17. (C) COMMENT. In conversations with post before the change in government, former DPM Muasher, who also chaired the National Agenda commission, has noted the skepticism among many political activists and journalists who, Muasher argued, should be supporters of the King's reform agenda (ref A). Our recent conversations confirm that the skepticism is still there among some segments of civil society. We think Bakhit could well overcome it if he is seen as working to push electoral reform through parliament.
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